

Workplace Writing In English: Insights From Malaysian Bank Managers

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Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of a series of interviews with three local commercial bank managers, describing workplace writing among Malaysian bank executives as writers of English as a second language (ESL). Existing studies on workplace writing are found to be limited in number, particularly those that investigate writing among bank executives. In addition, the status of English as a second language (L2) poses an inherent linguistic challenge for Malaysians and, thus, results in a different set of writing needs than for native writers of English. These factors illustrate the need for an in-depth investigation of the Malaysian banking institutions context. This study is part of a larger research, and data from this study was collected through semi-structured interviews, involving three managers as experienced informants. Their feedback was divided into four categories: the language of correspondence, the writing responsibilities at each bank, the roles of computers and writing software to assist in writing tasks, and the future of writing software programs in Malaysia. The findings can be summarized as follows: 1) English was the correspondence language in two out of the three banks; 2) writing was a frequent responsibility among most of the executives; 3) the executives were generally not provided any assistance with regard to writing; and, 4) a writing software program tailored for ESL writers was deemed a necessary form of assistance in consideration of the multiple tasks that need to be performed by the bank executives.

Keywords: workplace writing, bank executive, computer-aided, second language, Malaysia.

Introduction

There is a significant necessity for further research on workplace writing, as is reflected by the discrepancy between its great importance and the low competence level identified by researchers (Murphy & Jenks, 1982; Casady & Wasson, 1994; Tg Nor Rizan Tg Mohd Maasum et al., 2007). The employees of the banks examined in this study must frequently perform writing tasks in their normal workday; likewise, as reported in many other research findings, a significant amount of time is spent on writing in all businesses

to varying degrees dependant on position (Bennet & Rhodes, 1988; Briguglio, 2007; Hafizoah Kassim & Fatimah Ali, 2010; Haifa et al., 2010). Although certain jobs require less writing, such as those in retail and blue-collar manufacturing, it is nonetheless a skill that is fundamental to the performance of most positions (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

Mabrito (1997), who studied 60 recently appointed front-line supervisors at a large Midwest Steel manufacturing plant in the United States (US), reported that 70% of the participants spent approximately 25% of their working days writing. Briguglio (2007) recorded that the employees at two different multinational companies in Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong perceived writing as a prerequisite to working effectively. In a more recent study, Hafizoah Kassim & Fatimah Ali (2010) found writing to be of equal importance to speaking and was rated the most important skill by a group of 65 engineers from 10 multinational chemical companies across Malaysia.

In the information age, writing is becoming more important to entrepreneurs than ever. As the world is increasingly globalized with the introduction and advance of the Internet, companies depend on information to keep their competitive edge, which inevitably requires the task of writing. In addition, the extensive use of computers and the Internet has considerably raised the profile of writing (Siti Hamin Stapa & Ismie Roha Mohd Jais, 2005) as employees not only have to write, but must do so effectively. Despite writing being an important and frequent task, the writing problems reported in studies which are cited in this present paper are rather alarming. Many new hires suffer from deficiencies in writing, and graduates are often unprepared technically to enter the work world. Despite the many reference books available on the market to coach writers toward better writing skills in Business English, mistakes in workplace writing texts are evident and are continually recurring.

This disturbing writing dilemma includes even native writers of English in the US (National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges, 2004). In a survey of human resource directors in businesses across the US, many new hires were considered to be incompetent with regard to successfully handling the writing responsibilities of their positions (Vaughn, 1985). Employers were reported to have found that, one of the shortcomings shown among job applicants was serious grammatical deficiencies as well as a lack of practical business writing skills (Murphy & Jenks, 1982). Casady and Wasson (1994) in a nationwide survey of key personnel administrators in selected companies in the US reported three writing deficiencies among the participants: 1) mechanics (the major writing deficiency); 2) content; and, 3) style and tone. Some British firms were also found to have the need for hiring trainers in order to help workers with their writing (Arlidge, 2000).

Malaysian studies have recorded similar findings with regard to such writing deficiencies. Prospective young executives were found to face many problems in accomplishing writing tasks, even when writing a simple application letter (Tg Nor Rizan Tg Mohd Maasum et al., 2007). In a 2008 study, Siti Hamin Stapa et al. found that 118 out of 205 applicants for a post in *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* ranged between the levels of "very weak" and "fair" in their writing. Texts written by the participants were found to be

“inadequate and ineffective in terms of ideas, accuracy and presentation” (Siti Hamin Stapa et al. 2008, p.28). The study concluded that the participants’ written literacy had yet to meet the workplace writing demands.

Motivation for This Research

The impetus of this research stems from the lack of studies in the area of workplace writing. Although Forey (2004, p.448) claimed that an increasing number of studies was being conducted to investigate workplace English, she cited researchers such as St. John (1996), Swales (2000), and Hewings (2002) who believed that findings from the area are “still rather limited as compared to many other well-researched applied linguistics areas of study”. The limitation to the current body of knowledge is not only reflected by the insufficient number of studies, but also by the nature of the available studies, as only few have combined texts and linguistic realizations with people from the workplace (Forey, 2004).

While there are a number of international studies related to workplace writing, this number is low in the Malaysian contexts. Out of the few studies that exist, Yuen Chee Keong (2007) found that written language, as opposed to the speech events, is rarely studied by Malaysian researchers. He went on to cite studies that investigated workplace communication such as Anie Atan (1998), Le Vasan (1996), Puvenesvary (2002, 2003), Sarjit and Lee (2006) and Ting (2002), but pointed out that only the one by Le Vasan looked into the written forms of communication in the workplace as data for analysis (Yuen Chee Keong, 2007).

Research on authentic written texts by bank executives is even more limited, presumably because of the banks’ policy of confidentiality. However, Gunnarsson (2009) led this research to some useful findings as she compared writing activities in three banks and three engineering firms in Europe. With regard to writing performed by the banks, the activity was primarily carried out at the headquarters in the presence of a professional internal writing staff that produced the company texts – texts used for presentation and promotion of the banks internally and externally. This group of texts included annual reports, brochures, advertisements, messages to staff, and letters. The banks also had external writers to help with certain text material, whereas product texts – the ones supplied to the customers, were written by non-professional internal writers. Text writing had a major role in the banks, and professionalism was linked to writing, especially the writing of company texts. When a new employee was recruited, writing competence was often a deciding factor for hiring. It was also noted that the banks provided internal training on writing skills to their staff.

Two major conclusions could be drawn from Gunnarsson’s (2009) study on the variables that determined how language was perceived. The first is the size of company, as the perception regarding the role of language was at variance between the banks and the engineering firms. This could be due to the fact that the banks studied were larger enterprises than the engineering firms. In support of this claim, Gunnarsson (2009) purposely mentioned that the largest engineering company was also more concerned

about language. The second variable is the nature of the business activity. Since the banks were in charge of people's money, credibility and trustworthiness were important, and these were established through language.

Another study with an involvement of bank executives was conducted by Kheng-Suan Chew (2005), who reported a lack of cooperation from the banks in Hong Kong. With an aim to describe the workplace writing among the new entrants, the data obtained was viewed alongside the English Language and Business Communication curriculum offered at a university in Hong Kong to compare what was being taught at the university and what was needed in the workplace. The research started with letters to 20 banks in Hong Kong in June 1999, requesting their participation in the study. Of these, 4 banks finally replied in the affirmative over the course of the following few months, after repeated attempts on the part of the researcher; 3 were local banks operating only in Hong Kong, while 1 was an international bank with its headquarters in North America. A total of 16 bank employees in the four banks participated; they were interviewed and asked to complete a questionnaire, detailing various aspects of their work and the language used.

Because the study involved the business world and, in particular, the world of banking, where data is extremely sensitive, Kheng-Suan Chew (2005) reported that there were many more factors beyond her control in the study, such as the number of banks that could be included, as well as the number of employees who could be interviewed and surveyed. The research, however, managed to reveal some important findings: 1) there was a clear divide between spoken and written discourses in the banks in Hong Kong with Cantonese used in spoken discourse and English used in written discourse; 2) translators were needed to act as a bridge between the users of these two languages; 3) the number of people who were fluent in both Cantonese and English was below the level that allowed maximum productivity in these financial institutions; 4) almost all written communicative tasks were carried out in English, while most oral communicative tasks were carried out in Cantonese; 5) the employees' interest in receiving language training is somewhat stronger for speaking skills than for writing skills; and, 6) regarding writing skills, the employees are interested in learning to write reports, business letters, minutes, and bank documents.

Purpose of the Study

Since writing among white collar workers, such as the engineers, has not been widely researched (Hafizoah Kassim & Fatimah Ali, 2010) in Malaysia, this study aims to broaden the horizon and include banking institutions as an area for study. Having to juggle many different tasks, it is likely that executives are emotionally challenged when producing business texts (Sidey, 1999); however, the entire experience has become less strenuous in the age of technology, as writing is sped up by the use of computers. Studies have shown positive impacts on writing as a result of technological advances (Kuiper, 1994). Computers have quickened the process of revising, encouraging writers to be alert with regard to their grammar with the help of the grammar checker when running a word processor, and have guided them to learn the importance of details in writing with or without a software program (Baron, 2000; Marwa, 2007; McKay, 1998; Sterkel et al.,

1986). With the advent of the new millennium and the rise of the Internet, many software programs have been created to assist writers with their work. Most of these programs are developed internationally by speakers of English as a native language. Among these programs meant to facilitate top quality writing are WhiteSmoke, Writer's Workbench, and Grammar Expert Plus (TopTenREVIEWS, 2011).

As part of a larger research funded by the university grant UKM-GUP-TMK-07-03-031, this study attempts to investigate the writing activity among local executives from the viewpoint of their superiors – the bank managers. Considering the status of English as an L2 in Malaysia, this study investigated how extensive the use of the language is in written documents. Data from the interviews would greatly assist in mapping out the next step of the research, which is to conduct a survey among a group of executives. As only banks in which English is a language of correspondence will be further studied, findings from this series of interviews served to determine the selection of banks.

Profile of Participants

There were 8 local banks out of the 24 commercial banks in Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2011), but three were eventually used for the study, as the managers gave their permission to be interviewed. Located in Bangi, Selangor, these were bank branches of local commercial banks headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Although the number of banks in the study is small, the informants had many years of experience. All of the participants started working at the banks as clerks and climbed the corporate ladder through education enhancement and work experience. As getting cooperation from the banks was difficult, the cooperation that these few gave in this stage was quite valuable. There were, however, some limitations, as only one manager gave the permission to be tape-recorded and all the informants requested that they and the banks remain anonymous; hence, the letters A, B and C with regard to the banks in the following descriptions.

The first informant was a female manager with 33 years of experience. Her first employment was with Bank A, and she remained serving this particular bank since that time. She started off as a clerk at the bank after her High School Certificate (a school examination taken before ending the secondary level of education in Malaysia), and continued her studies toward a diploma before being promoted to branch manager. Bank A is monitored by the *Bank Negara Malaysia* (Central Bank of Malaysia), with products and services offered by 117 branches across the country. It is a local bank that is yet to expand to the global market.

The second informant was a male manager with 22 years of experience from 1988 until the present time. He had first joined another local bank before serving Bank B, one of the largest financial service providers in Malaysia. As a local commercial bank, it offers a full range of financial products and services and has made its presence in many South-East Asian countries, and also has a number of branches in the Western countries. The final informant was another female manager with 15 years of experience with Bank C. Before her service, she spent 4 years working in a different sector. Bank C is also one of

the largest banks and financial groups in Malaysia, with significant banking operations in most of the other Southeast Asian markets, as well as in the Western countries.

Procedure

The three informants were approached via phone calls in early October 2010. Once their approval to be interviewed was obtained, an e-mail that listed the scopes of questions was sent to the informants. This was to ensure that they were able to prepare in advance and provide comprehensive information, since some of the interview questions required recalling past experiences. With the pre-determined questions (see Appendix I), the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The interview guideline was comprised of four interrelated parts. The first contained demographic questions and the second aimed at participants' recounting of their work experience with their bank. The third part sought information about the writing activities of their executives in the workplace, ranging from the types of documents, writing frequency, how writing was performed and monitored, conspicuous writing problems, and help offered to the executives when writing. The final part of the study was an inquiry regarding the participants' opinions on the future of a writing software program in Malaysia.

Each informant was interviewed on a separate occasion. The first interview was with the employee of Bank A on October 20, 2010 in the manager's office. Conducted early in the morning after the bank started its operations, the interview lasted about one hour and twenty minutes, the longest of all three interviews. The interview guideline was adhered to without additional questions. Since the manager allowed the conversation to be tape-recorded, it was transcribed verbatim immediately after the session for an early analysis before the researcher moved on to the next two interviews.

The second interview was on November 10, 2011 at Bank B after office hours had ended. However, as the session took place at the front desk in the presence of his subordinates who were working nearby, the manager refused to be tape-recorded, but did allow note-taking by the researcher. There was some improvisation in the interview as the researcher had to omit several questions that appeared irrelevant based on the manager's responses. In the earlier part of the interview, it was found that writing has been a limited activity after the introduction of the writing centralization system by the headquarters (HQ) in 2001. Other questions regarding writing responsibility were thus replaced with new questions that focused on the internal writing tasks performed at the bank. The interview was later typed and saved as a word processor document.

The final interview was held on November 23, 2010 at Bank C in the manager's office. Concerned about the confidentiality of the information shared, this informant also refused to be tape-recorded. The general guideline of questions was adhered to. However, triggered by the responses received during the interview, the researcher decided to pose a new question regarding the informant's personal view about the role of higher institutions in preparing their graduates for workplace demands. This particular comment will be reported in the conclusion of this paper as an addition.

For the purpose of analysis, the data were arranged according to the interview questions. After deciding on categories based on the interview questions, the responses were grouped and rearranged for the discussion.

Findings

The data indicated a certain amount of similarities across four categories, namely the language of correspondence, writing responsibilities in the bank, roles of computer and writing software to assist writing, and the future of computer-aided writing software programs.

1. The banks' language of correspondence

The first theme relates to the banks' language of correspondence, displaying the different predispositions: Malay language dominance, bilingualism, and English language dominance. In Bank A, Malay is the corporate language, used dominantly in written correspondence and oral communication. English served only as an alternative language when a customer decided to begin any form of communication in that language, particularly in e-mails. However, it is worth noting the manager's concern regarding the poor English writing proficiency among the executives when responding to customers.

In Bank B, both English and Malay are used in written correspondence and oral communication, but English is the primary corporate language. Bilingual documents begin with English and, where there is a contradiction in meaning, the English version prevails. External documents addressed to HQ or other branches are also written in English. In documents such as memos and emails circulated inter-branch, a special style is applied, resulting in a brief and incomplete structure, but understood by the executives. Regular writings do not require the use of perfect grammar so long as the message content is conveyed. However, the manager stated his preference that internal documents and memos circulated within the bank be written in Malay.

English holds a dominant status in Bank C. Only formal letters to customers are bilingual, whereas correspondence to superiors, the HQ, or other employees are written in English. The requirement for perfect grammar in writing among the executives depends on the individual manager at each branch, and this particular manager is not strict as long as she believes that the message has been successfully conveyed.

2. The writing responsibilities: the frequent writers, types of documents produced, and how writing is performed and monitored in the bank

The second theme involves the issue of writing responsibilities for the frequent writers, types of documents produced, and the ways in which writing is performed and monitored in the workplace. In Bank A, writing is normally performed by the Administrative Unit, a unit responsible for producing general letters and documents, which also acts as the Public Relations (PR) Office in responding to customers' requests and complaints. The other units will only produce proposals and related letters. For instance, the Credit Unit

will be in charge of preparing only the proposals and other related documents for loan approval. The Recovery Unit is another unit that performs writing on a daily basis, as the executives need to constantly write to follow up unsettled loan payments. Their job is simpler, as the master copies of formal letters have been prepared by the HQ and need only little editing on the executives' part. However, even though the format of some letters has been predetermined by the HQ, Bank A puts an extra effort into writing differently for customers who are social superiors. Documents to these customers are usually produced by senior executives.

Apart from formal letters and proposals, minutes of meetings are also produced from time to time. Minutes at the branch level are taken by clerks; however, in certain meetings such as the regional meeting, for which the presence of clerks is not permitted, an executive is assigned to record the minutes. Writing in the bank has always been independent, and the bank never hires the service of professional writers. The only external services they hire are in relation to consultation regarding creative layouts for flyers and advertisements. Proofreading of documents is performed by senior executives, and the documents are submitted to the manager for approval. In past cases, to the manager's dismay, the proofread manuscripts still contained mistakes and needed some adjustments.

The HQ of Bank B has divided its operation into three sectors: investment, retail, and Islamic with branches all over the country. Since 2001, following the introduction of the writing centralization system (a system where the HQ produces most of the writing and distributes them to the bank branches), writing has been a limited activity at the bank branches. However, writing is still frequent at branches that run the investment sector. Bank B is a branch that provides only the retail and Islamic sectors; therefore, the executives rarely write. All sample documents are produced by the HQ and need to be closely followed by the other branches, up to the level where advertisements written in the branch are copied from the main advertisement by the HQ. The Corporate Communication Unit at the HQ controls the production of flyers and advertisements, and distributes them to its branches. Other documents that need to be written without the use of a template will be written by the manager – especially recommendation letters for job promotions. At times, writing is produced by an executive on the manager's behalf, but editing will still be performed by the manager.

Examples of writings prepared by executives are comments to justify or support applications of credit loans, minutes, and memos. Since a comment is an internal document, the manager encourages that it be written in Malay. However, memos circulated via email, whether from the manager to the subordinates or from executives to their colleagues, are produced in English. From the manager's observation, the writing styles of his executives are often influenced by their spoken language.

In Bank C, the manager believes that writing is of vital importance, since it is performed on a daily basis; in addition, she believes that writing incompetence will hinder the process of delivering the right messages. In this bank, the Business Unit does most writing. The documents are normally proposals for reviewing a company's performance

before a loan application is approved, other than formal letters written to customers. Although the other units do not write as frequently, writing is still necessary because the task is based on daily operations, which usually involve responding to customers' requests and complaints.

Producing a formal letter is easy, as the writing is centralized, i.e., the HQ usually provides samples to be followed by the branches. The only editing required is to change the date, the recipient's particulars, and other necessary details, such as figures. Production of business proposals by a specific unit or department, however, is more challenging as this requires the ability to write without the use of a template. The difficulty in such writing varies, for it depends upon the educational background of the particular executive. There are cases in which clerks, who have served the bank for a long time, are promoted to executives. These are usually the ones who struggle when asked to write in English, as they had often not been through any formal training and had only written a limited amount of documents in English.

The length of the proposals written in the bank is typically three pages, and all outgoing documents are monitored by the manager. She claimed to be tolerant with regard to grammatical errors and language structures in writing as long as the message is delivered clearly and correctly, as she believes that the company is mainly concerned with getting business deals, not with language.

Writing to social superiors with honorific titles such as *Tan Sri*, *Datuk*, or *Datin* requires no particular style, and the same documents are used for these recipients as for other customers. As of the time of the interview, Bank C has never hired external professional writers for any services.

3. The role of computers and writing software to assist writing

All the executives in Banks A, B, and C were found to produce writing only with the use of Microsoft Word, without any writing templates except for the samples of formal letters given by their respective HQs. It was also noted that no assistance in the form of a writing software program was ever offered to the executives. While the manager of Bank B displayed an unawareness of such software programs, the manager of Bank C realized that the practice of writing business documents with the assistance of writing software programs is regular among companies in the Western world. Nevertheless, for her bank, the manager of Bank C claimed that it should be an individual's effort to improve his or her writing and language skills, if the person plans to advance in the field.

4. The future of computer-aided writing software programs in Malaysia

The manager from Bank A agreed that such a writing program would be helpful to the executives, particularly with regard to their vocabulary and their attention span, as they were prone to redundancy of ideas and sentences in their writing. Although the manager of Bank B admitted his unawareness of business writing software programs, he still acknowledged that such a program would be a great help, as the writings of his

employees are occasionally influenced by emotions. This reflected his fear that the angry tones in the executives' writing might end up offending the customers. The manager of Bank C stated that a writing software program would help improve writing among the executives, but re-stated that their main concern is doing business, not mending language and writing accuracy.

Discussion

The interviews conducted during this study proved to be of great significance, offering one insight after another, mainly with regard to the status of written English practices in Malaysian banks. They also illustrated the similarities and differences of writing across banks, as well as opinions with regard to the future of a software program to serve as a writing assistance to bank executives.

In terms of the written languages used among the banks, English held a dominant status as the correspondence language, as well as an alternative to the Malay language. English is deemed important in two of the banks, as they have attracted a variety of English-speaking customers and made their presence internationally. Bank A, however, is currently catering only to the Malaysian market; thus, the need to use English is not as strong. Nevertheless, the bank still receives customers from different educational backgrounds and ethnicities, leading to the occasional need for the executives to communicate in English.

Writing is confirmed in these settings as a frequent, if not daily, activity. To some departments, such as the Administrative Unit, Recovery Unit, and Business Unit, it is a key activity. For the other executives, such as those working at the front desk and those who handle customers' complaints and queries, writing is performed only when the need arises. Even though writing is not frequent in Bank B, as it is a branch in the retail sector, writing is still a major responsibility in the investment sector at the HQ. More importantly, writing is not only frequent among the executives internally, but also is also used to send messages externally to the HQ and to clients of the banks. This data helps to add to the existing literature suggesting that writing (whether it is performed in English or Malay) is also a major activity within Malaysian banks.

Similar types of documents are written in all three banks, namely formal letters and proposals. Although Bank B referred to proposals as "comments," they nonetheless function as brief proposals that evaluate a customer's eligibility for a loan. As banks make large profits from interests charged on loans, it was expected that proposals are produced most in this line of business, and these interviews have served as proof to that early prediction. Meeting minutes and memos also serve as other examples of documents that these banks have in common.

As formal letters contain formats prepared by the HQ, they do not impose a problem, as they need little editing with regard to the customers' personal particulars. Proposals, however, turned out to be a great challenge, as problems with attention span, grammar, vocabulary, and writing style were noted. Some executives have troubles recognizing

redundancy of ideas, or worse, sentences, within a single writing. Redundancy, apart from errors, in business texts is undesirable as it signifies incompetence. The writing problems found in this study are in agreement with the previous studies on participants from other areas (e.g., Murphy & Jenks, 1982; Siti Hamin Stapa et al., 2008; Tg Nor Rizan Tg Mohd Maasum, 2007; Vaughn, 1985) and the situation is disturbing since banks are institutions in which credibility and trustworthiness are of utmost importance (Gunnarsson, 2009).

These writing problems were certainly not helped by the absence of training at the three bank branches, or by the practice of writing by using only a Microsoft Office word processor. Although the word processor is a useful tool, equipped with proofreading features such as spelling and grammar checkers, it is not designed to monitor language errors and suggest professional improvements. The executives not only must write, but also must search for information, crunch numbers, synthesize ideas, and present them in the simplest and most comprehensible way to be read. These tasks alone consume time, and if the executives need to worry over writing mechanics in order to produce an error-free piece of writing without assistance, staying on the job will then produce increasing workplace stress. Relying on supervision from senior executives and the manager is not productive, as this requires them to put off other important responsibilities of their own.

Views from two of the managers are contradictory to those in Gunnarsson's (2009) study, as the participants from the European banks believe that their written texts are a reflection of the organization's social structure, values, knowledge, and culture. However, the display of nonchalance by the Malaysian managers with regard to writing errors could be influenced by the status of English as an L2 in Malaysia, where language errors are not taken as seriously. Nevertheless, flawless use of language is an advantage that boosts the image and reputation of a bank or any other business. As customers come from different social and education backgrounds, producing original and unique writing to suit the different groups is a valued effort. Although there is no guarantee for flawless writing with the use of a writing software program alone, it is a helpful tool to assist novice writers in reaching the ultimate goal of business writing – to write as a professional. The software program would, for instance, be able to help detect the complexity of word choices in a text to increase its readability for a specific target audience. As the managers agreed to varying degrees that a computer-aided writing software program would help improve writing among their executives, these interviews became more than simply arenas for providing information on writing in the workplace: they have verified the need for the development of a writing software program. This program may not be a solution to all writing challenges, but it will be useful for assisting the executives with writing mechanics, putting their mind at ease to concentrate on the content, and encouraging a self-paced longer-term learning.

Conclusion

Writing is a skill that many executives find difficult, particularly ESL writers, who are inherently challenged by the varied linguistic properties of English. To compound these matters, business writing requires a very specific writing style. It is therefore no surprise

that the managers who participated in this study stated their concern over their executives' writing problems.

Across the three banks, workplace writing is quite similar in terms of the genre of documents produced, the way in which writing is performed, and the unavailability of assistance with regard to such writing. The findings of this study also showed similarities to the findings of a study by Kheng-Suan Chew (2005) in Hong Kong, particularly in terms of the point of division across some Malaysian banks in which English presides as a dominant language in the corporate world and Malay as the national language when communicating. However, with regard to professional writers' services and training for non-professional writers, the lack of both as seen among the studied banks indicate a variation to the European banks studied by Gunnarsson (2009).

Based on the additional questions addressed by the last informant, this study has also found a lack of research in the area of workplace writing and an inadequacy of training provided to graduates for meeting the demands of workplace writing. Throughout her 15 years of work experience, this manager indicated that she was never approached by researchers regarding workplace writing. She had also expressed her concern over the performance of fresh graduates from local universities, as they were found to be lacking in confidence with regard to writing in English, and conveyed her belief that some local universities did not satisfactorily equip their students for the job market.

This preliminary data collection has enlightened the way in which future steps in this area of research should be mapped out, and it has also suggested the need for a writing software program tailored for ESL writers in Malaysia.

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Appendix I

Interview guideline

*Provide the overview of the research and describe the research objective.

*Interview session begins.

1. Can you introduce yourself in terms of education background and work experience?
2. How long have you been working at the banking sector?
This question will be asked if the manager doesn't mention years of work experience at the bank in question 1.
3. For the time being, I suppose everybody writes using computers at the bank? Is there any other means of writing?

Let's talk about your current workplace.

4. Who writes for the bank? Which department writes the most? Is there any official recording of the number of writings produced? Do you hire external professional writers?
5. What is your language of correspondence? How often do your subordinates write in English? What about Malay?
6. How important is writing at the bank? What types of documents do you perform? How often do you write?
7. How do they write (e.g. word processor? Which version?)?
8. Who monitors or corrects the writing?
9. What happens if the writing needs amendment? Do they have to redo on their own or refer to someone (a senior maybe)?
10. Is there any template provided? Is there any writing software program to help them write?
11. Is there any standardization order in terms of writing from the HQ?
12. Do you think your subordinates need help in terms of writing? What kind of help?

*Notes for interviewing session

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